

VERTIGO

Plus  
a backup  
story  
by  
MICHAEL ALLRED

FABLES<sup>no. 54</sup>

WILLINGHAM  
BUCKINGHAM  
LEIALOHA  
PEPOY

*"suffer not"*

Dec 06

SUGGESTED FOR  
MATURE READERS  
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NEW YORK.

SIR?  
YOU  
NEED TO  
WAKE UP,  
SIR.

FABLE-  
TOWN.

SIR?  
I **HATE**  
DISTURBING  
YOU THIS LATE  
AT NIGHT, BUT  
YOU NEED TO  
GET UP.

3:05

WHUNNN?  
HOBBES?

WHA'R  
YOU DOING IN  
MY BEDROOM?  
IT'S THE MIDDLE  
OF THE NIGHT.

YOU'RE  
NEEDED DOWN-  
STAIRS, SIR. I'M  
TOLD IT'S **MOST**  
URGENT.

## THE BURNING TIMES

Part  
Three of  
**SONS OF  
EMPIRE**



**Bill Willingham** writer-creator  
**Mark Buckingham** penciller

**Steve Leialoha** inkers  
**Andrew Pepoy** inkers  
**Lee Loughridge** colors

**Todd Klein** letters  
**James Jean** cover  
**Angela Rufino** asst. editor  
**Shelly Bond** editor



OKAY, I'M  
HERE.

WHAT'S SO  
CRITICAL  
THAT YOU HAD TO  
DRAG ME OUT  
OF BED?



WHAT  
THE BLOODY  
HELL--?

PRINCE CHARMING,  
MAYOR OF FABLETOWN, MEET  
THE NOTORIOUS SERIAL KILLER AND  
FABLETOWN TRAITOR HANSEL, WHO'S  
APPARENTLY THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
FROM THE ADVERSARY.

DO NOT  
USE THAT INSULTING  
TERM. YOU MAY REFER  
TO HIM AS THE  
EMPEROR.

EXCEPT  
THAT THE  
EMPEROR ISN'T  
THE REAL  
POWER, IS  
HE?

WE  
ALREADY  
KNOW IT'S  
GEPETTO  
WHO PULLS  
YOUR  
STRINGS.



WHAT ANY OF YOU PEOPLE **THINK** YOU KNOW ABOUT THE EMPIRE IS OF LITTLE CONCERN TO ME.

I'M HERE, AT YOUR INVITATION, SOLELY TO REPRESENT THE EMPEROR'S **INTERESTS**, NOT TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A REMEDIAL **EDUCATION** ON IMPERIAL HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT.

SINCE YOU, MR. CHARMING, HAVE FINALLY **ARRIVED**, AND SEEM TO BE THE ONE CURRENTLY IN **CHARGE** OF THIS DISREPUTABLE LITTLE REFUGEE CAMP, I HEREBY PRESENT MY CREDENTIALS.

AND NOW, WITH THAT DONE, I'LL BE ON MY WAY.



BUT WAIT--YOU CAN'T--  
I DON'T--  
YOU CAN'T GO YET!

OH? YOU INTEND TO UNLAWFULLY **DETAIN** THE EMPIRE'S OFFICIAL ENVOY?

IF THAT'S YOUR PLAN YOU SHOULD EASILY HAVE THE WHOLE BUNCH OF US CAPTURED IN ONLY A FEW HUNDRED MILLENNIA.

NO!  
IT'S NOT--

OR WAS YOUR COMMANDO WOLF'S INVITATION MERELY A RUSE TO LURE US INTO TRAPS, ONE AT A TIME?

OF **COURSE** YOU'RE FREE TO GO, BUT YOU JUST GOT HERE. WE SHOULD TALK.



WE WILL. MY STAFF IS WORKING ON A LONG-TERM AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION.

DIPLMACY, PROPERLY CONDUCTED, IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT. AND ONE GLANCE AT YOU, MR. MAYOR, DEMONSTRATES YOU'RE **NOT** PREPARED TO BEGIN YET.



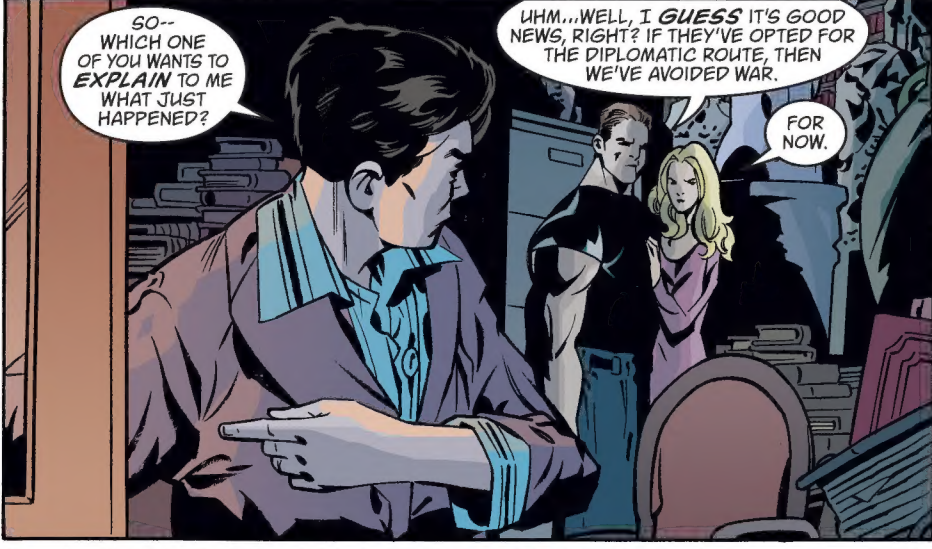
IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS I'LL BE DISTRACTED BY FIRST NECESSITIES-- SECURING OFFICES, RESIDENCES AND SO FORTH.

PROVIDED I TAKE ENOUGH TIME DOING IT, I'VE **EVERY** CONFIDENCE YOU MIGHT POSSIBLY BE ABLE TO READY YOURSELF FOR AT LEAST THE MOST **PRE-LIMINARY** OPENING COURTESIES.



I'LL SEND ONE OF MY AGENTS TO CONTACT YOU--IN TIME.

FINE!



SO-- WHICH ONE OF YOU WANTS TO **EXPLAIN** TO ME WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

UHM...WELL, I **GUESS** IT'S GOOD NEWS, RIGHT? IF THEY'VE OPTED FOR THE DIPLOMATIC ROUTE, THEN WE'VE AVOIDED WAR.

FOR NOW.



WHAT WAS THAT YOU SAID ABOUT HIM? SERIAL KILLER? TRAITOR?

WELL, AS YOU **KNOW**, PRINCE, HANSEL WAS A LONGTIME MEMBER OF FABLETOWN, UNTIL HE COMMITTED--



AS I KNOW? AS I KNOW? WHAT IS IT I KNOW? I DON'T KNOW THAT MAN! I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE!

OH, OF COURSE, SIR. SOMETIMES I FORGET HOW LONG YOU'VE STAYED AWAY FROM FABLETOWN.



HANSEL USED TO BE ONE OF US UNTIL HIS ACTIVITIES AMONG THE MUNDY MADE FURTHER ASSOCIATION UNTEENABLE.

HE WAS ACTUALLY THE FIRST MEMBER OF FABLETOWN EVER TO GET TOSSED OUT—HIS PROTECTIONS UNDER THE GENERAL AMNESTY QUASHED.



OKAY, IT'S OBVIOUS ONE OF YOU NEEDS TO FILL ME IN ON THIS CHARACTER—IMMEDIATELY.

BY ELIMINATION, THAT MEANS YOU, BEAUTY, BECAUSE BEAST HAS OTHER DUTIES TO ATTEND TO.



I WANT HANSEL FOLLOWED. I WANT TO KNOW EVERYWHERE HE GOES AND EVERYONE HE TALKS TO. I WANT TO KNOW WHERE HE'S SETTING UP HIS SO-CALLED OFFICES AND RESIDENCES.

I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING HE EATS AND WHEN HE EATS IT—AND WHEN HE SLEEPS, SCREWS, SHITS, WIPES, WASHES, AND HOW HE AMUSES HIMSELF.

OKAY, BUT--

HOLD ON, GUNGA DIN, I'M NOT DONE YET. I ALSO WANT TO KNOW THE SAME THINGS ABOUT EVERY MEMBER OF HIS STAFF.



AND JUST HOW THE HELL IS IT EMPIRE AGENTS SEEM TO BE ABLE TO COME AND GO AT THEIR BLOODY GOD-DAMNED LEISURE? WHERE'S THEIR SECRET GATEWAY TO THE HOMELANDS?



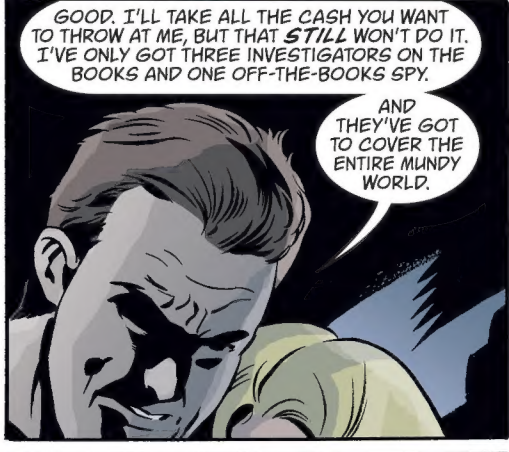
IS IT *MY* TURN TO TALK NOW?

BOSS, I AGREE WITH EVERY *ONE* OF THOSE REQUESTS. I'D LIKE TO KNOW ALL OF THAT, TOO, BUT *HOW* EXACTLY IS IT I'M SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO FIND IT ALL OUT?



I DON'T HAVE THE RESOURCES TO ACCOMPLISH A *FRACTION* OF THIS AMOUNT OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING.

IF YOU'RE WHINING FOR A BIGGER BUDGET FOR SPY OPS, THEN YOU'VE GOT IT. THE COFFERS ARE OFFICIALLY *OPEN*.



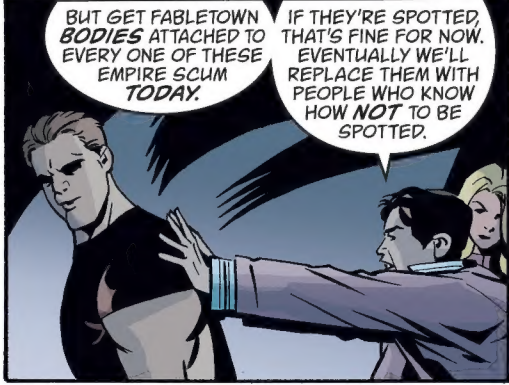
GOOD. I'LL TAKE ALL THE CASH YOU WANT TO THROW AT ME, BUT THAT *STILL* WON'T DO IT. I'VE ONLY GOT THREE INVESTIGATORS ON THE BOOKS AND ONE OFF-THE-BOOKS SPY.

AND THEY'VE GOT TO COVER THE ENTIRE MUNDY WORLD.



I SIMPLY DON'T HAVE THE TRAINED MANPOWER TO DO THIS KIND OF JOB.

THEN *HIRE* MORE, AND *TRAIN* THEM. GET CINDY TO TEACH THEM HOW TO SKULK ABOUT. HELL, CALL *BIGBY* BACK INTO ACTION IF YOU HAVE TO.



BUT GET FABLETOWN *BODIES* ATTACHED TO EVERY ONE OF THESE EMPIRE SCUM *TODAY*.

IF THEY'RE SPOTTED, THAT'S FINE FOR NOW. EVENTUALLY WE'LL REPLACE THEM WITH PEOPLE WHO KNOW *HOW NOT* TO BE SPOTTED.

NOT MORE THAN THREE  
BLOCKS AWAY...

THIS  
IS THE **BEST**  
YOU COULD DO,  
KERR?

ON SUCH  
SHORT NOTICE  
AND WITH A CLOSE  
PROXIMITY TO  
FABLETOWN AS OUR  
FIRST PRIORITY,  
YES, SIR.



THEN IT WILL  
HAVE TO DO. AFTER  
ALL, OUR OWN **COMFORT**  
IS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE  
TO OUR MISSION.

I TOLD THE  
LABORERS TO SET  
UP OUR RESIDENTIAL  
FLOORS FIRST, SIR, IF  
THAT'S AGREEABLE  
TO YOU.



AH, AND  
HERE'S OUR NEW  
LANDLORD.

NOT  
**LANDLORD**,  
ACTUALLY. MORE  
LIKE SUPERIN-  
TENDENT.

THE **REAL**  
OWNER HIRED ME  
TO MANAGE THE  
BUILDING FOR HIM,  
IN RETURN FOR  
GETTING TO LIVE  
RENT-FREE.





PLEASUED TO MEET YOU, MR.-- UH--?

SMITH.

MY NAME IS KEVIN THORNE. I'LL BE LIVING IN THE LOFT ABOVE YOUR THREE FLOORS, BUT DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANY NOISE. I KEEP QUIET AS A MOUSE.



BASICALLY, WHEN I'M HOME I WORK ON MY NOVEL, AND NOW, THANKS TO THE COMPUTER AGE, YOU WON'T EVEN HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THE TAPPING OF TYPEWRITER KEYS.

YOU'LL PAY RENT TO ME AND CALL ME FOR ANY REPAIRS. I'M REALLY BEGINNING TO LEARN MY WAY AROUND THE BUILDING'S ANCIENT PLUMBING SYSTEM.



THAT WILL BE FINE-- I GUESS. BUT I WANT TO **IMPRESS** ON YOU THAT WE'VE IMPORTANT BUSINESS TO CONDUCT HERE.

I EXPECT YOU TO LEAVE US ALONE, UNLESS AND **UNTIL** WE CALL ON YOU.



THEN WE'RE OF A LIKE MIND, MR. SMITH. I THINK WE'LL GET ALONG JUST **FINE**.

I'VE GOT MY WRITING TO KEEP ME OCCUPIED. MY CURIOSITY'S ENTIRELY FOCUSED ON MY OWN PROJECT. YOU CERTAINLY WON'T BE TRIPPING OVER **ME** ALL DAY.

MEANWHILE,  
BACK AT  
FABLETOWN...

I'VE  
ASKED FRAU  
TOTENKINDER TO  
JOIN US, MR.  
MAYOR.

SINCE  
SHE'S UNDER-  
STANDABLY  
OUR GREATEST  
EXPERT ON  
HANSEL'S  
LIFE.

I KNOW  
LITTLE MORE  
THAN ANYONE  
**ELSE** COULD,  
IF HE TOOK  
THE TIME TO  
**READ** SOME  
OF THE BOOKS  
SURROUNDING  
US ON ALL  
SIDES.

WE DO  
**SO** LOVE TO KEEP  
DETAILED RECORDS ON  
EACH FABLETOWN  
MEMBER.

I DON'T  
REALLY CARE **WHO**  
DOES THE TELLING, AS  
LONG AS THE STORY GETS  
TOLD. SO PLEASE  
BEGIN.

"LONG AGO IN THE HOMELANDS,  
A YOUNG HANSEL AND HIS SISTER  
GRETEL HAD BEEN TURNED OUT  
TO DIE IN THE WILDERNESS WHEN  
THEY DISCOVERED MY LONELY HUT  
IN THE BLACK FOREST."

LOOK AT **THIS**,  
GRETEL! A MIRACLE  
HOUSE OF SWEETS AND  
TREATS IN THE MIDDLE  
OF THE WOODS!

WE'RE  
**SAVED**,  
HANSEL!

"SENSING THEIR PROXIMITY, I DRESSED MY HOME UP IN GINGERBREAD AND OTHER TASTY SWEETS IN ORDER TO LURE THEM IN."

THIS IS SO GOOD!

AND OH, HOW MUCH BETTER ARE THE DELIGHTS TO BE FOUND WITHIN.

WHAT TREATS COULD BE EVEN BETTER THAN THOSE OUTSIDE?

COME CLOSER, CHILDREN, SO THAT I CAN BETTER SHOW YOU BY THE COZY LIGHT OF MY FIRE.

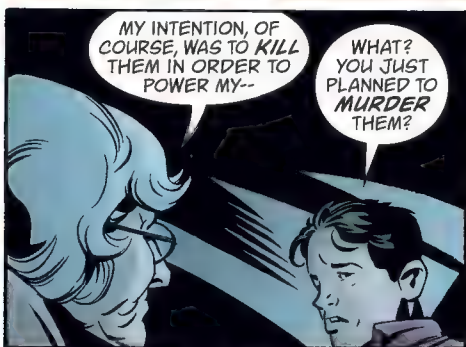


MY INTENTION, OF COURSE, WAS TO KILL THEM IN ORDER TO POWER MY--

WHAT? YOU JUST PLANNED TO MURDER THEM?

NO, DEAR PRINCE, THEIR OWN PARENTS PLANNED TO MURDER THEM. I SIMPLY CONTRIVED TO MAKE USE OF THEIR DEATHS IN SERVICE TO MY OWN NEEDS.

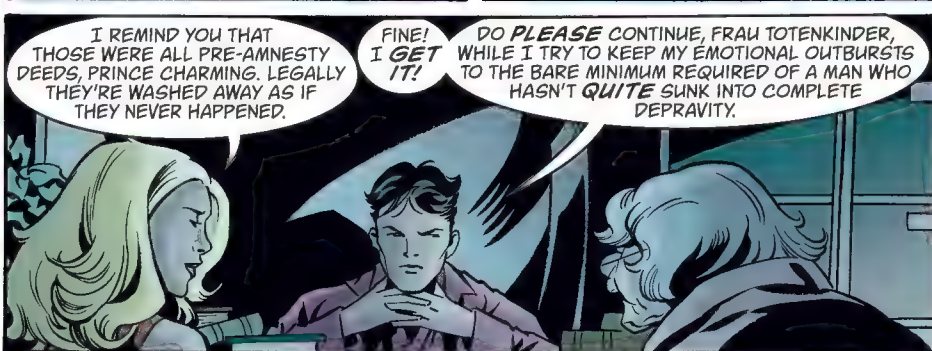
NOW, SHOULD I CONTINUE MY STORY, OR DO YOU INTEND TO CARRY ON SHOWING POIGNANT OUTRAGE AT MY WICKED PAST?



I REMIND YOU THAT THOSE WERE ALL PRE-AMNESTY DEEDS, PRINCE CHARMING. LEGALLY THEY'RE WASHED AWAY AS IF THEY NEVER HAPPENED.

FINE! I GET IT!

DO PLEASE CONTINUE, FRAU TOTENKINDER, WHILE I TRY TO KEEP MY EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS TO THE BARE MINIMUM REQUIRED OF A MAN WHO HASN'T QUITE SUNK INTO COMPLETE DEPRAVITY.



"FOR REASONS I'D PREFER *NOT* TO DISCUSS, THE LITTLE TYKES WERE ABLE TO GET THE BETTER OF ME, BURNING ME UP IN MY OWN OVEN.

**IIIIIIIIIIIII!**  
**I'M BURNING!**  
**BUUUUURNING!**

PUSH  
HARDER,  
GRETEL!

I AM,  
HANSEL! I  
AM!



"I DIED OF COURSE, BURNED COMPLETELY DOWN TO ASHES. IT TOOK ME EVER SO LONG TO COME BACK FROM THAT.

NOW LET'S  
RUN AWAY FROM  
THIS TERRIBLE  
PLACE!

NOT  
YET, DEAR  
SISTER!



"I BELIEVE HANSEL'S LIFELONG FASCINATION WITH KILLING WITCHES WAS BORN THAT DAY.

I WANT  
TO TARRY AND WATCH  
FOR AWHILE.

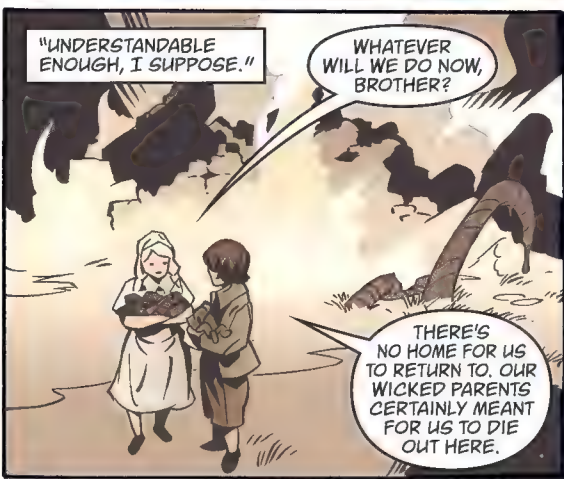
TO MAKE  
SURE SHE BURNS  
COMPLETE.



"UNDERSTANDABLE  
ENOUGH, I SUPPOSE."

WHATEVER  
WILL WE DO NOW,  
BROTHER?

THERE'S  
NO HOME FOR US  
TO RETURN TO. OUR  
WICKED PARENTS  
CERTAINLY MEANT  
FOR US TO DIE  
OUT HERE.



BUT I HAVE AN INKLING  
GOD ABOVE HAS A SPECIFIC  
PLAN FOR OUR LIVES.



"THE CHILDREN EMERGED FROM THE BLACK FOREST INTO A WORLD MUCH CHANGED SINCE THEY DISAPPEARED INTO THE WOODS ONLY DAYS EARLIER.

OH DEAR. WHAT IS THIS NOW, HANSEL?

IT'S OBVIOUS THE WORLD HAS BEEN OVERRUN WITH EVIL, AND SO HAS BEEN GIVEN OVER TO THE CREATURES OF THE DEPTHS TO PUNISH OUR MANY INIQUITIES.



"THE CHILDREN FLED AHEAD OF THE INVADING ARMIES, TAKING REFUGE IN ONE CHURCH AFTER ANOTHER, LIVING OFF THEIR CHARITY, UNTIL YEARS LATER THEY LEARNED OF THE SANCTUARY WORLD.

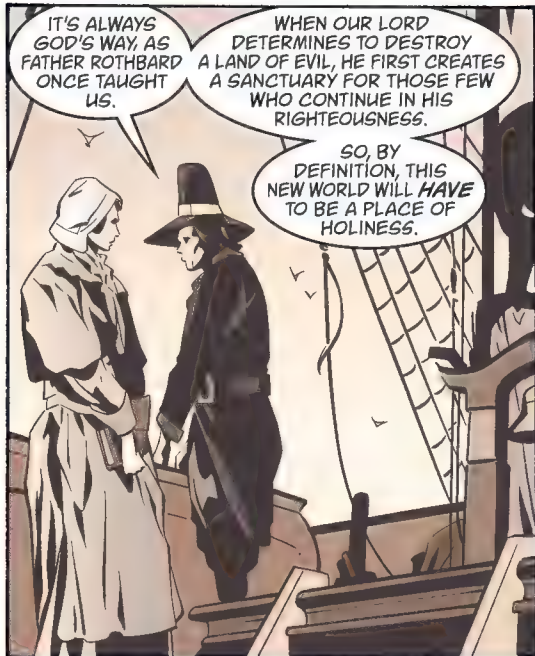
IT'S ALWAYS GOD'S WAY, AS FATHER ROTHBARD ONCE TAUGHT US.

WHEN OUR LORD DETERMINES TO DESTROY A LAND OF EVIL, HE FIRST CREATES A SANCTUARY FOR THOSE FEW WHO CONTINUE IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

SO, BY DEFINITION, THIS NEW WORLD WILL HAVE TO BE A PLACE OF HOLINESS.



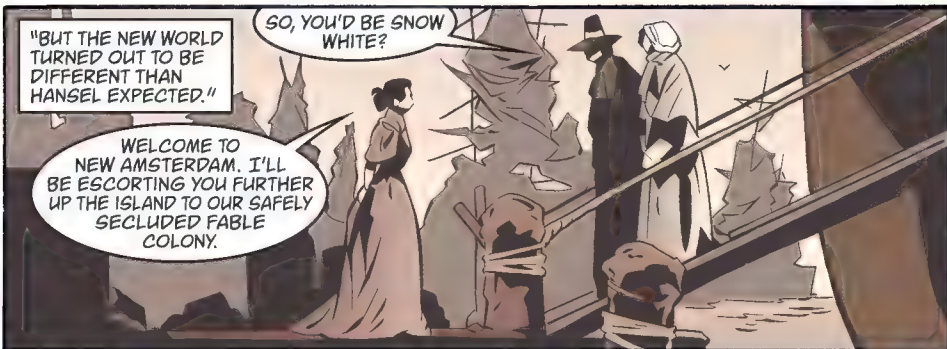
BUT HOW CAN WE BE SURE THIS NEW WORLD WILL BE ANY BETTER THAN THE LAST?

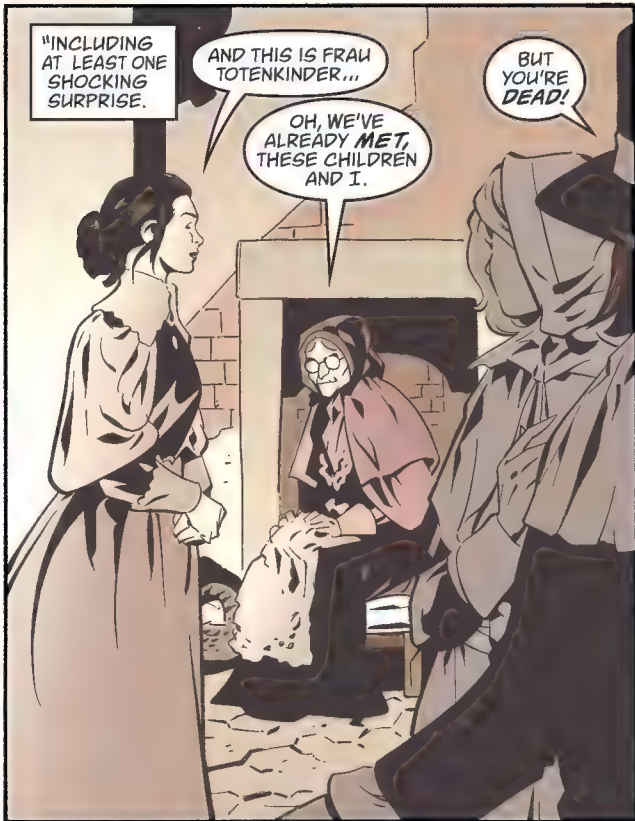


"BUT THE NEW WORLD TURNED OUT TO BE DIFFERENT THAN HANSEL EXPECTED."

SO, YOU'D BE SNOW WHITE?

WELCOME TO NEW AMSTERDAM. I'LL BE ESCORTING YOU FURTHER UP THE ISLAND TO OUR SAFELY SECLUDED FABLE COLONY.



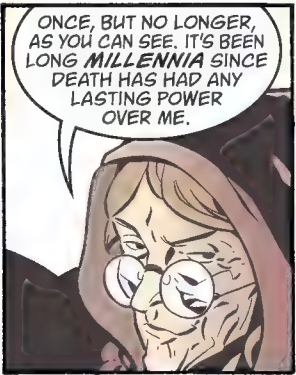


"INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE SHOCKING SURPRISE."

AND THIS IS FRAU TOTENKINDER..."

BUT YOU'RE DEAD!

OH, WE'VE ALREADY MET, THESE CHILDREN AND I.



ONCE, BUT NO LONGER, AS YOU CAN SEE, IT'S BEEN LONG *MILLENNIA* SINCE DEATH HAS HAD ANY LASTING POWER OVER ME.

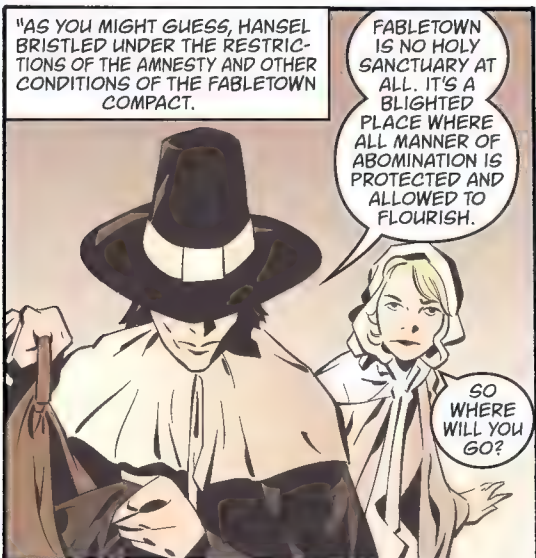


THIS CREATURE IS A FOUL *WITCH!* WE MUST DESTROY HER IMMEDIATELY!



NO ONE WILL BE DESTROYING HER--IMMEDIATELY OR OTHERWISE.

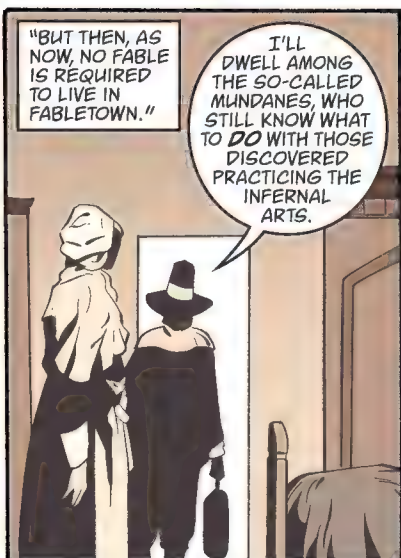
LIKE YOU, FRAU TOTENKINDER IS PROTECTED BY THE GENERAL AMNESTY AGREEMENT--THE VERY SAME DOCUMENT YOU SIGNED THIS MORNING.



"AS YOU MIGHT GUESS, HANSEL BRISTLED UNDER THE RESTRICTIONS OF THE AMNESTY AND OTHER CONDITIONS OF THE FABLETOWN COMPACT.

FABLETOWN IS NO HOLY SANCTUARY AT ALL. IT'S A BLIGHTED PLACE WHERE ALL MANNER OF ABOMINATION IS PROTECTED AND ALLOWED TO FLOURISH.

SO WHERE WILL YOU GO?



"BUT THEN, AS NOW, NO FABLE IS REQUIRED TO LIVE IN FABLETOWN."

I'LL DWELL AMONG THE SO-CALLED MUNDANES, WHO STILL KNOW WHAT TO *DO* WITH THOSE DISCOVERED PRACTICING THE INFERNAL ARTS.

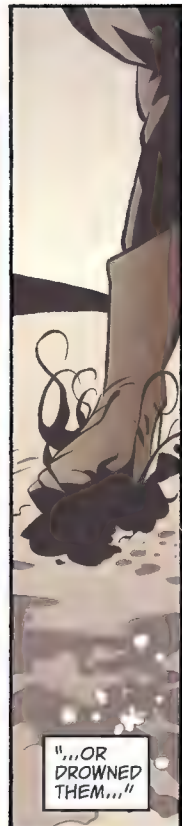
"HANSEL TOURED EUROPE DURING THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE FIVE DECADES KNOWN AS THE BURNING TIMES, FERRETING OUT WITCHES WHEREVER HE WENT.

FIVE TIMES I'VE HELD HER UNDER, AND YET SHE STILL LIVES. IT'S MANIFESTLY **CLEAR** SATAN'S POWER PRESERVES HER.



"HE EARNED FAME IN EVERY CONTINENTAL COURT AS AN EXPERT WITCH HUNTER, TESTIFYING IN ONE TRIAL AFTER ANOTHER, AND EAGERLY HELPING WITH THE EXECUTIONS THAT FOLLOWED.

"FROM WURZBURG TO TRIESTE, THROUGHOUT FRANCE, GERMANY AND SWITZERLAND, HE BURNED THEM...



"...OR DROWNED THEM..."

"...OR HANGED THEM-- HOWEVER THE LOCAL CUSTOMS DECIDED. THE MANNER OF EXECUTION DIDN'T MATTER AS LONG AS IT WAS DONE.



"IN TIME HIS MERE ACCUSATION WAS DEEMED SUFFICIENT TO PROVE A SUSPECT GUILTY OF WITCHCRAFT.

THAT MAN AND THAT WOMAN ARE WITCHES. AND THAT WOMAN LIES WITH **DEMONS** AT NIGHT.



"WHEN THE WITCH CRAZE IN SALEM AND THE REST OF NEW ENGLAND BROKE OUT IN THE 1690S, HANSEL GLADLY RETURNED TO AMERICA.

SUSANNAH MARTIN WON'T CONFESS, GOODMAN HANSEL.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. IF SHE CONFESSES, WE HANG HER. IF NOT, WE **PRESS** HER TO DEATH. EITHER WAY, THE LORD'S WORK WILL BE DONE TODAY.



"HE'D OFTEN MAKE THE NEWSPAPERS."

I DON'T LIKE THIS AT ALL, ICHABOD. HANSEL'S DESPICABLE ACTIVITIES RISK CALLING UNDUE ATTENTION TO FABLETOWN.

HE'S NEVER MADE A CONNECTION TO US, MISS WHITE. SO FAR HE REMAINS WITHIN THE LETTER OF FABLETOWN LAW.





BUT IT SEEMS SINCE HE CAN'T KILL *REAL* WITCHES HERE, HE'S MAKING UP FOR IT BY FINDING HUNDREDS OF *FICTIONAL* ONES OUT AMONG THE MUNDANES.

NOT OUR BUSINESS, MISS WHITE. PUT HIM OUT OF MIND.



"BEING IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, WE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN HE'D COME TO VISIT."

I'M HERE TO SEE MY SISTER.



I'VE COME TO PLEAD WITH YOU AGAIN, GRETEL. *LEAVE* THIS WRETCHED PLACE WITH ME, SO I MAY BE FREE TO GATHER FORCES ENOUGH TO DESTROY IT FOREVER.

YOU SIMPLY DON'T UNDERSTAND, BROTHER. WHAT IF WE WERE *MISTAKEN* TO KILL FRAU TOTENKINDER SO LONG AGO?



SHE HAS SO MUCH *POWER*. SHE CONQUERED DEATH ITSELF. WE COULD BUILD A PARADISE ON *EARTH* WITH SUCH POWERS AS SHE POSSESSES.

YOU *DARE* SPEAK SUCH AFFRONTS TO THE LORD?





YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. HER WORKINGS HAVE **NOTHING** TO DO WITH OUR LORD, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. THEY AREN'T DIABOLICAL, THEY'RE--NEUTRAL. JUST ANOTHER SET OF TOOLS TO--

**SHUT UP, UNLESS YOU'D BE CURSED FOREVER! IN YOUR SIMPLE WOMAN'S NAIVETÉ YOU DON'T KNOW **WHAT** YOU SPEAK OF.**



BUT I **DO**, BROTHER. I KNOW! I'VE BEEN STUDYING WITH HER IN THESE YEARS YOU'VE BEEN AWAY. LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!

OH DEAR GOD! SATAN, UNABLE TO ATTACK ME DIRECTLY, STRIKES AT ME THROUGH MY OWN **SISTER!**



MAKING OF YOU HIS **CREATURE!**

**WHACK!**

HANS--  
**UGH!**




"HE CLAIMED GRETEL BROKE HER NECK IN A FALL. ICHABOD CRANE WAS STEADFASTLY AGAINST LETTING ME INVESTIGATE TO DETERMINE THE TRUTH OF IT."

A TERRIBLE **ACCIDENT** HAS OCCURRED!



I THINK HE WAS AFRAID TO **OFFICIALLY** UNCOVER WHAT WE ALL KNEW.

BUT IN ANY CASE, THAT WAS THE LAST STRAW. HANSEL WAS STRICKEN FROM THE FABLETOWN COMPACT AND BANISHED FROM FABLETOWN FOREVER.

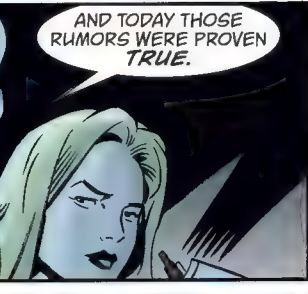


AND SLOWLY OVER THE YEARS, COUNTRIES BEGAN STOPPING WITCH EXECUTIONS. HANSEL'S FAME SLOWLY TRANSFORMED TO INFAMY.

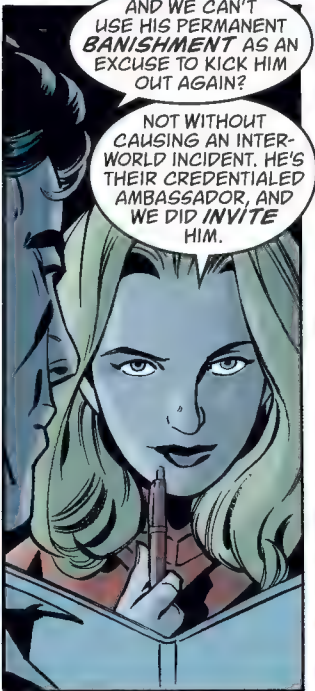
FINALLY HE DROPPED OUT OF SIGHT ENTIRELY.



RUMOR HAD IT HE'D FLED BACK TO THE HOMELANDS TO HELP THE ADVERSARY HUNT DOWN UNAUTHORIZED PRACTITIONERS OF SORCERY.




AND TODAY THOSE RUMORS WERE PROVEN **TRUE**.



AND WE CAN'T USE HIS PERMANENT **BANISHMENT** AS AN EXCUSE TO KICK HIM OUT AGAIN?

NOT WITHOUT CAUSING AN INTER-WORLD INCIDENT. HE'S THEIR CREDENTIALLED AMBASSADOR, AND WE DID **INVITE** HIM.



WE INVITED **SOMEONE**, NOT HIM IN PARTICULAR.

I SUSPECT HE WAS CHOSEN, IF NOT ENTIRELY, AT LEAST IN **PART** BECAUSE OF THE ANGER AND FRUSTRATION IT WOULD CAUSE US.



I HAVE NO DOUBT OF THAT. THE ADVERSARY WOULD JUST LOVE IT IF WE FLIPPED OUT AND DID SOMETHING STUPID.

SO FIRST THING WE DO IS PUT THE WORD OUT. NO ONE SO MUCH AS GIVES A RUDE GLANCE TO AMBASSADOR HANSEL, NO MATTER HOW WE FEEL ABOUT HIM.



WE'LL KILL THIS ASSWIPE WITH KINDNESS. BUT AT THE SAME TIME HE NEVER GETS TO SEE ANYTHING IMPORTANT AGAIN.

Ribbit.



NO MORE VISITS TO THE BUSINESS OFFICE. LET'S SET UP ONE OF THE WOODLAND VIP SUITES FOR ALL FURTHER SESSIONS.

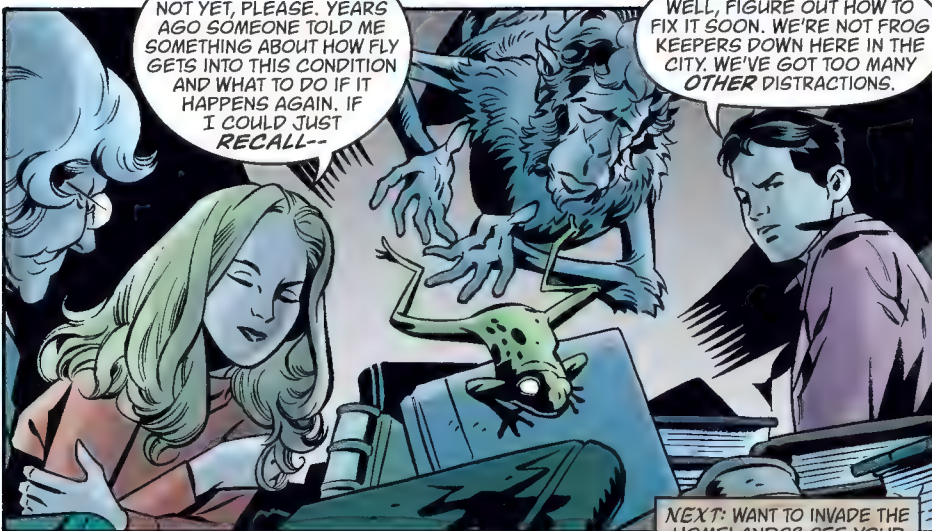
AND HE'S NEVER TO ENTER FABLETOWN WITHOUT AN ESCORT.

Ribbit.



FLYCATCHER GOT OUT OF HIS CAGE AGAIN.

WE REALLY NEED TO THINK ABOUT SENDING HIM UP TO THE FARM.



NOT YET, PLEASE. YEARS AGO SOMEONE TOLD ME SOMETHING ABOUT HOW FLY GETS INTO THIS CONDITION AND WHAT TO DO IF IT HAPPENS AGAIN. IF I COULD JUST RECALL--

WELL, FIGURE OUT HOW TO FIX IT SOON. WE'RE NOT FROG KEEPERS DOWN HERE IN THE CITY. WE'VE GOT TOO MANY OTHER DISTRACTIONS.

NEXT: WANT TO INVAD THE HOMELANDS? SEE YOUR ARMY RECRUITER TODAY!

# A Thorn in Their Side?

**Bill Willingham:**  
writer/creator

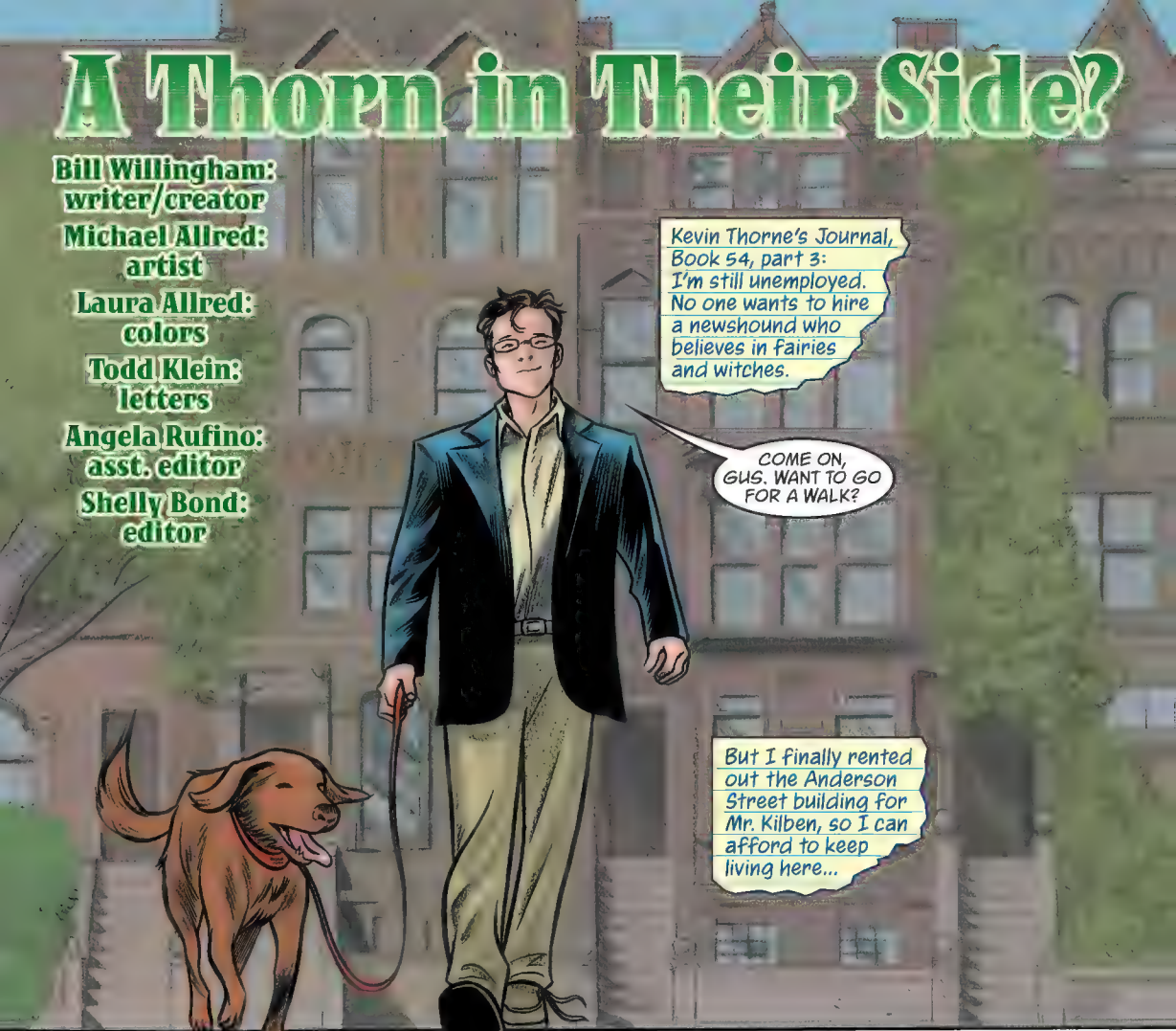
**Michael Allred:**  
artist

**Laura Allred:**  
colors

**Todd Klein:**  
letters

**Angela Rufino:**  
asst. editor


**Shelly Bond:**  
editor



Kevin Thorne's Journal,  
Book 54, part 3:  
I'm still unemployed.  
No one wants to hire  
a newshound who  
believes in fairies  
and witches.


COME ON,  
GUS. WANT TO GO  
FOR A WALK?

But I finally rented  
out the Anderson  
Street building for  
Mr. Kilben, so I can  
afford to keep  
living here...



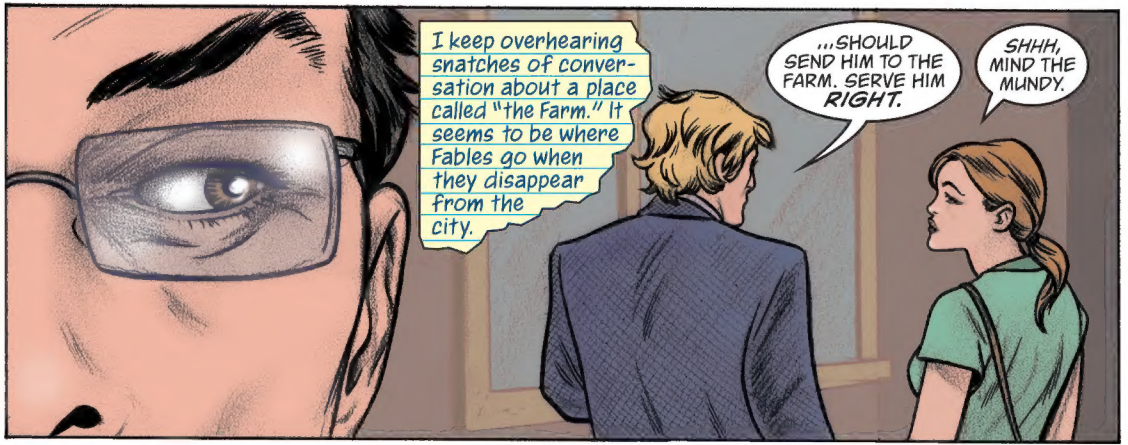
...as long as  
I'm frugal.

LET'S GO SEE  
OUR FRIENDS DOWN  
THE STREET.



And I desperately need to keep living  
here, recording my observations of  
the strange little community on  
Bullfinch Street.

Just a harmless  
mundy out walking  
his dog. Not worth  
noticing.



I keep overhearing snatches of conversation about a place called "the Farm." It seems to be where Fables go when they disappear from the city.

...SHOULD SEND HIM TO THE FARM. SERVE HIM RIGHT.

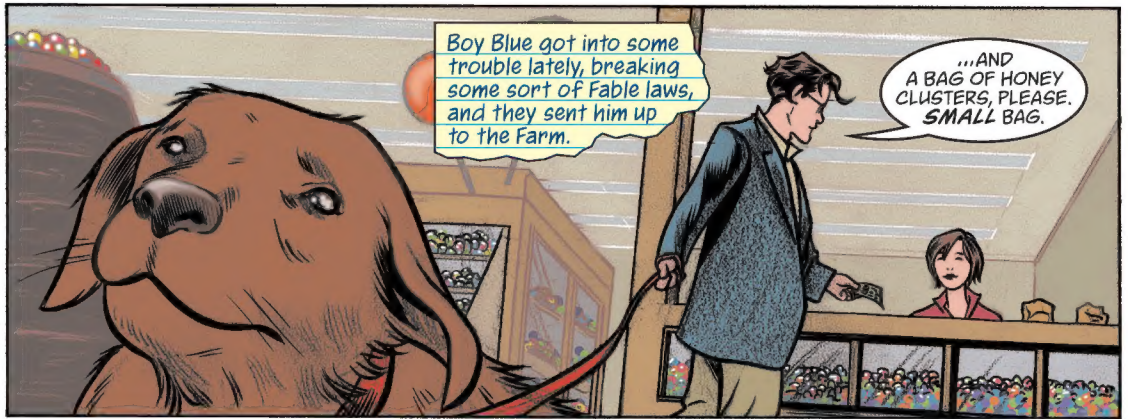
SHHH, MIND THE MUNDY.



Snow White gave birth to monsters and had to go to the Farm. Bigby Wolf disappeared and lately I overheard that he's now "at the Farm."

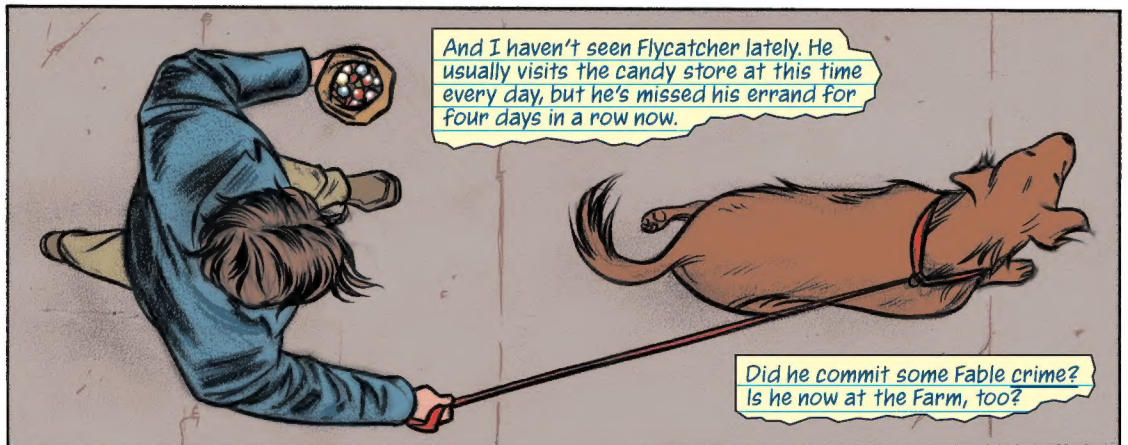
Only street in town that still allows dogs in the shops. Screw the municipal regulations.

**EDWARD BEAR'S CANDIES**



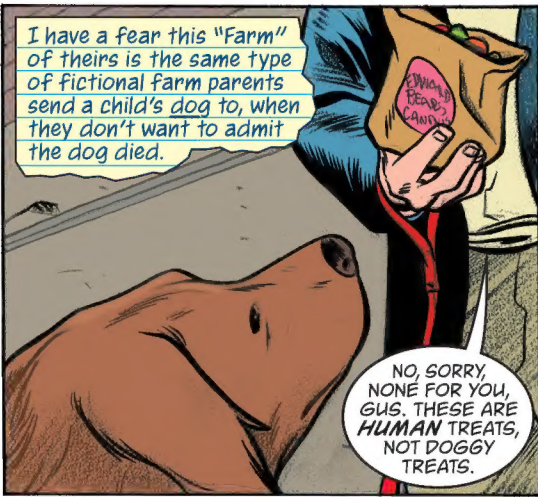
Boy Blue got into some trouble lately, breaking some sort of Fable laws, and they sent him up to the Farm.

...AND A BAG OF HONEY CLUSTERS, PLEASE. **SMALL BAG.**



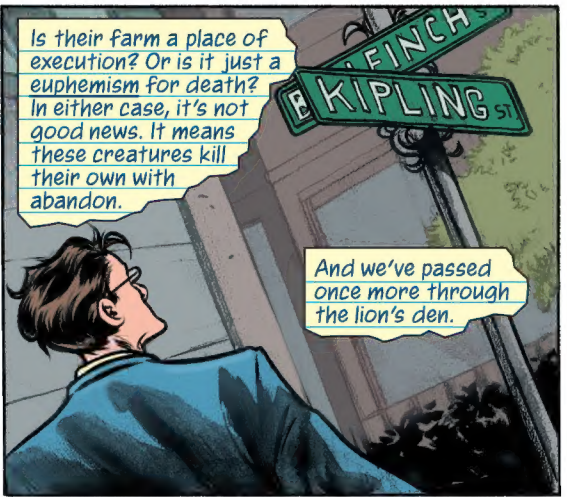
And I haven't seen Flycatcher lately. He usually visits the candy store at this time every day, but he's missed his errand for four days in a row now.

Did he commit some Fable crime? Is he now at the Farm, too?



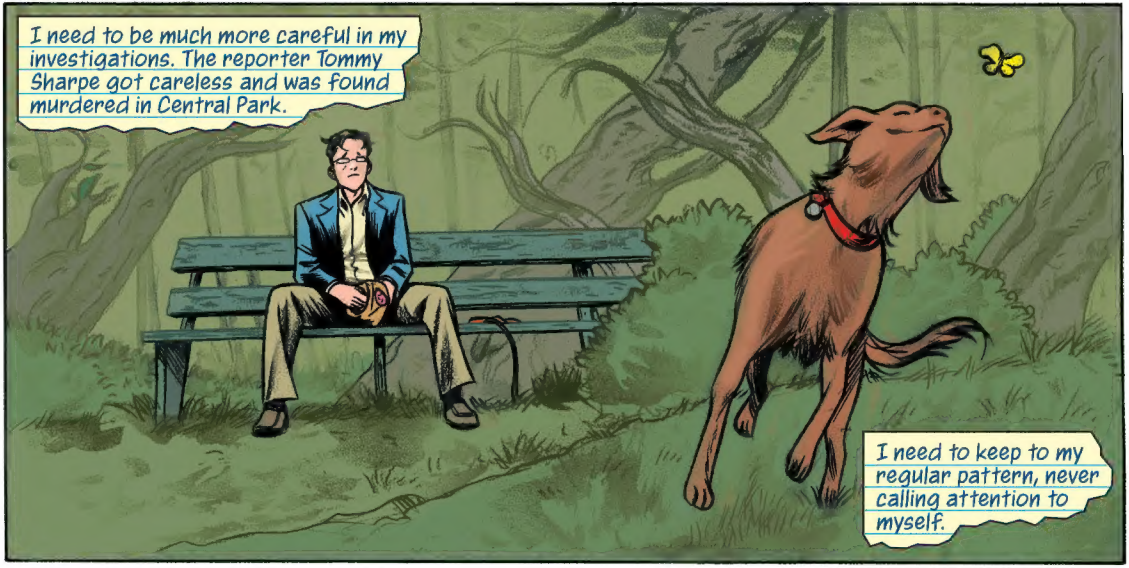
I have a fear this "Farm" of theirs is the same type of fictional farm parents send a child's dog to, when they don't want to admit the dog died.

NO, SORRY, NONE FOR YOU, GUS. THESE ARE HUMAN TREATS, NOT DOGGY TREATS.



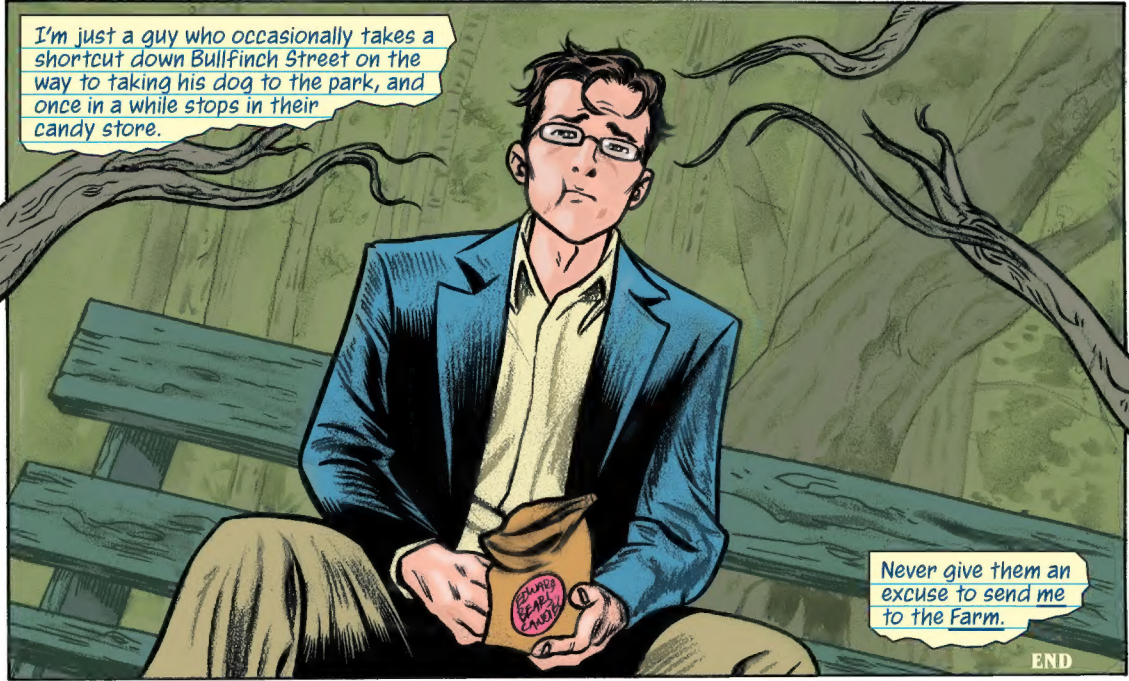
Is their farm a place of execution? Or is it just a euphemism for death? In either case, it's not good news. It means these creatures kill their own with abandon.

And we've passed once more through the lion's den.



I need to be much more careful in my investigations. The reporter Tommy Sharpe got careless and was found murdered in Central Park.

I need to keep to my regular pattern, never calling attention to myself.



I'm just a guy who occasionally takes a shortcut down Bullfinch Street on the way to taking his dog to the park, and once in a while stops in their candy store.

Never give them an excuse to send me to the Farm.

END

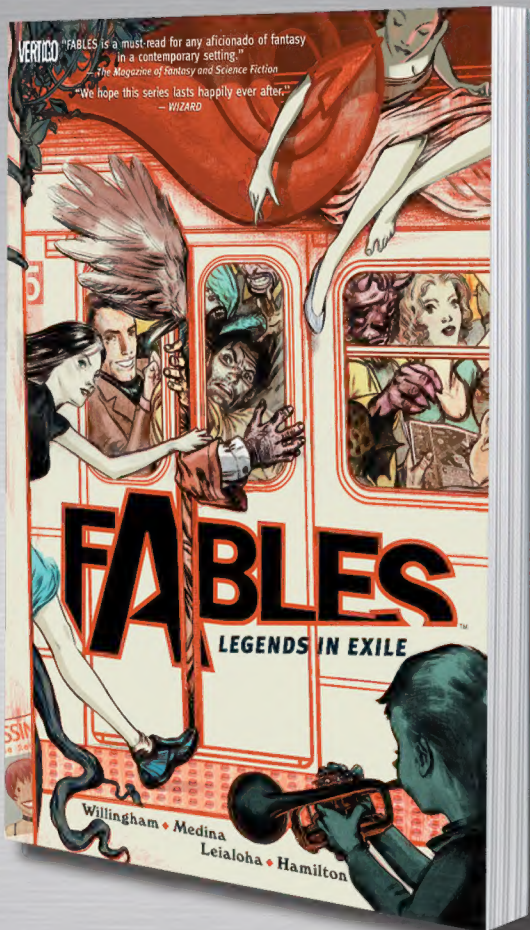
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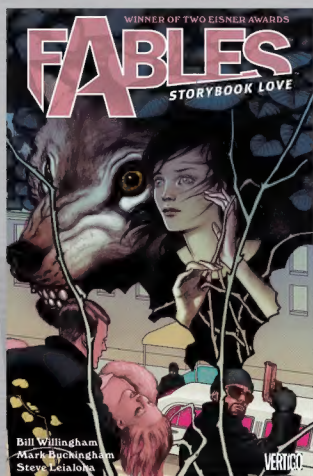
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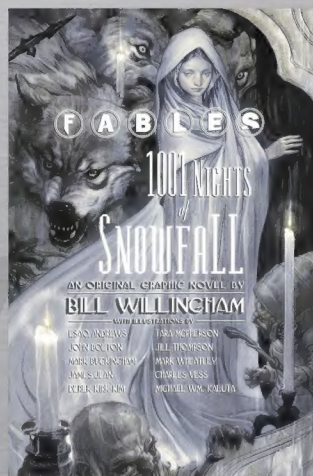
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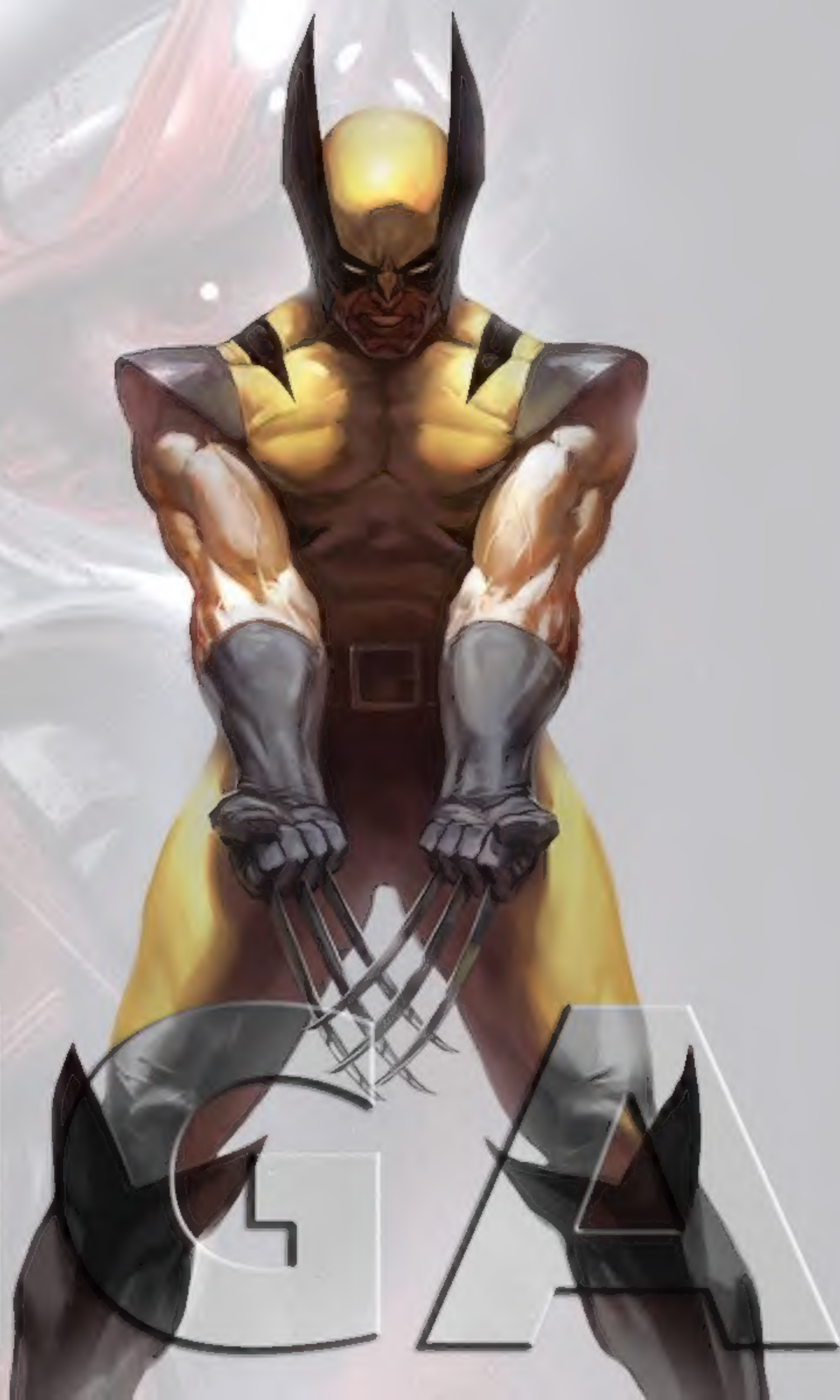
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NATHAN